

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE BROWN COUNTY
VETERANS' RECOGNITION SUBCOMMITTEE**

Pursuant to Section 19.84, Wis. Stats., a regular meeting of the **Brown County Veterans' Recognition Subcommittee** was held on Tuesday, February 16, 2016 at 4:30 p.m. in Room 201 of the Northern Building, 305 E. Walnut Street, Green Bay, Wisconsin.

PRESENT: Chair Bernie Erickson, Ed Koslowski, Carl Soderberg, Rosemary Desisles, Jim Haskins, Joe Witkowski, Jerry Polus

EXCUSED: Duane Pierce, Delores Pierce, Tracy Rosinski

****Running Total of Veterans' Certificates: 1727**

1. **Call Meeting to Order.**

The meeting was called to order by Chair Bernie Erickson at 4:30 pm.

2. **Invocation.**

3. **Approve/Modify Agenda.**

Motion made by Joe Witkowski, seconded by Jim Haskins to approve. Vote taken. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

4. **Approve/Modify Minutes of January 19, 2016.**

Motion made by Ed Koslowski, seconded by Rosemary Desisles to approve. Vote taken. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

5. **Update re: Honor Rewards Program.**

CVSO Jerry Polus noted that things are moving forward very well with regard to the Honor Rewards Program. He said there were three bridges that needed to be crossed to get the program underway so veterans can sign up. The first bridge was to meet with the key business associations to promote the program and this has been done. Polus met with the Chamber of Commerce, Military Avenue Business Association, Greater Green Bay Visitors and Convention Bureau, Downtown Main Street Business Association and On Broadway. The concept of the program was presented to all of these organizations and they all seem to be very supportive and said they will promote the program among the businesses they are involved with.

The second bridge is to work with the Register of Deeds and Fidar Technologies to get the website set up. Polus said that they are currently half way across this bridge. He will be meeting with the Register of Deeds later in the week to finalize the information and will then provide it to Fidar who will set up the website. Polus is hopeful that the website will be up by the end of February. At that time, businesses interested in participating can go on the website to sign up and list their offer. Polus will be sending a letter to the businesses outlining the program and the criteria for participating.

The third bridge is to hold a press conference officially kicking off the program through the media and at that point veterans will be able to sign up for the program. Polus is hopeful that at least 100 businesses sign on to the program by Memorial Day as that is when he is targeting the media kickoff which will include representatives of the business associations, participating businesses and some veterans. At that point, veterans will be able to sign up for the program.

Polus continued that he has spoken with the business associations regarding what forms of identification could be used by veterans. The forms of identification that will be accepted are the retired military ID card, VA healthcare enrollment card, the Wisconsin drivers' license with the veteran identifier or the Honor Rewards card. He said that many veterans already have one of these cards. If they do not, then they could get the Honor Rewards card mailed to them. Polus continued that a great deal of thought has been given to the eligibility of the program. The following are the eligibility requirements that were decided upon:

- Veterans who have received an honorable discharge or general discharge under honorable conditions
- Veterans who have served 90 days active duty during a designated wartime period or 24 months of continuous service during a peacetime period
- Veterans who were discharged with less than the above service if they were discharged for a service connected disability recognized by the VA, for hardship reasons or who have completed required active duty service obligations
- Soldiers currently serving under a 6 year contract with the National Guard in good standing with his/her unit and has completed basic and advanced training requirements
- Prior National Guard members/reservists who have completed 6 year contract in good standing (must provide an NGB 22 or retirement point record)

Rosemary Desisles said that there are some area businesses who expect to be listed in the ad in the paper for Veterans Day offers and donations. She is wondering how to get around the businesses that expect this if they do not enroll in the Honor Rewards program and secondly, how will veterans who do not enroll in the program learn of and receive their Veterans Day discounts. Erickson responded that the Veterans Day program and the Honor Rewards program are two completely different things. Polus added that businesses that choose to participate in the Honor Rewards program can modify their offers at any time and therefore they could switch their offers up for Veterans Day. Polus felt that the Honor Rewards program would eliminate the need for the Subcommittee to go out and solicit businesses for discounts. Desisles was concerned that some businesses may contact her to ask about the Veterans Day program. Erickson suggested that once the Honor Rewards program is kicked off, the businesses that provide donations and/or prizes for Veterans Day could be contacted to let them know about the program and they could then decide if they want to offer some sort of discount on a year round basis or just for Veterans Day. Witkowski felt that the Subcommittee could still go out and collect door prizes for Veterans Day since the Honor Rewards program is for discounts only.

Polus said that the website will be organized by category and once it is all set up the Veterans Day donation list can be cross referenced so the businesses that sign up for Honor Rewards would not need to be contacted again for Veterans Day. Desisles would definitely like to lighten the load of calls to be made for Veterans Day and she thought it would be a good idea to make it clear to the veterans that this may change the way things are done for Veterans Day. Erickson also said that veterans could be signed up for Honor Rewards at the Fair.

Eligibility was discussed further and Polus noted that he wants to make this as easy as possible for veterans and he thought through this very carefully. He wants the program to be all inclusive and is hopeful that the eligibility conditions set forth above allow for that. He acknowledged that there may be a few exceptions that they will have to deal with and they will look at those case by case.

Polus continued that the role of this Subcommittee will be to promote the program throughout the veteran community after it is announced. He said that he will be doing a mailing to all of the veteran groups towards the end of May to make people aware of the program, but he did not want anyone promoting anything until the program is officially announced.

6. **Possible Discussion re: 2016 Veterans' Appreciation Day at the Brown County Fair.**
6A. 25th Anniversary of Desert Storm.

The Fair event will be held on August 20 and this will be discussed in greater detail at the next meeting. Koslowski noted that he will probably be meeting with his veterans groups in June since everything should be pretty much the same as last year, but he would like to get the tickets out to the groups at the June meetings. Haskins said he will attend the next Fair Board meeting and report back to this group at the next meeting.

7. **Discussion and decision re: Non-attending Subcommittee members.**

It was noted that John Maino has not been to a meeting in several years. Erickson said that the standard in the County is that if someone has more than three unexcused absences they are removed from the Committee. Erickson said that he would like to see the seats on the Subcommittee filled with people who regularly attend meetings and are willing to work. He said that there will be a new Board of Supervisors in April and there may be people on it that wish to be part of this group.

Motion made by Ed Koslowski, seconded by Jim Haskins to remove John Maino from the Subcommittee. Vote taken. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

8. **Report from CVSO Jerry Polus.**

Polus reported that he and Ed Koslowski attended the Washington Lincoln dinner sponsored by the United Patriotic Society recently at the Woods. He estimated that there were about 70 people there and the evening consisted of dinner, a guest speaker and door prizes. Further, the Veteran of the Year award was given.

9. **Comments from Carl Soderberg.**

Soderberg reported that they are still hearing from veterans regarding individual unemployability. He does not know if the changes he spoke of at an earlier meeting have been reversed yet. He explained that the last blue ribbon pay in compensation review decided that individual unemployability should end at age 65. The theory behind this is that if a veteran is disabled and unable to work, it was to replace the income stream, but once you are 65, you should be retiring and collecting social security to replace the income stream so you would no longer need the disability.

Polus explained that there are two ways to receive 100% disability payments. One is on a schedule basis which means that your disability or disabilities total 100% scheduled. Individual unemployability is if you have a single disability rated 60% and it prevents you from being gainfully employed, or have a disability rating of 70%, with one of the disabilities being rated at 40% which prevents you from being gainfully employed.

Soderberg also stated that there is some legislation proposed by two Congressmen regarding review of dishonorable or less than honorable discharges but he does not believe that either Congressman is on the Subcommittee so he does not know if this will go anywhere. He continued that this is an issue that is getting more attention because a number of discharges are related to PTSD or other mental health issues and there is some movement to try to review dishonorable discharges because they have an effect later in life. It may take years before legislation passes, but there are beginning to be some discussions on this.

Soderberg also stated that he had recently attended a meeting at the Center for Suicide Awareness which has a new military subdivision. They are trying to find ways to plug some of the gaps not covered by the VA regarding mental health.

Soderberg continued that a summit will be held on February 17 at the regional office regarding medical billing for VA services. This would primarily affect vets at assisted living facilities or in a Wisconsin veterans' home. Soderberg explained that sometimes when there is an emergency situation where a veteran is moved via ambulance to a hospital for an emergency, if the transport is not preapproved the VA will not pay for the transport. Soderberg said the Veterans Health Administration will be talking to some of the providers on this so everyone knows what to do in this situation so a veteran does not get a large bill.

Finally, on March 2 at 11:30 am Concordia University, Ashwaubenon branch, will be having their veterans' resource meeting. This is a chance for people involved in veterans' issues, including government agencies and non-profits to collaborate and find out what everyone else does for future referral purposes.

Polus said that the third Wednesday morning of each month his office will be doing outreach at the Veterans' Manor. He will see if there is enough activity to justify spending a half day each month out there.

10. **Report from Committee Members Present (Erickson, Dahlke, Desisles, Haskins, Geiser, Koslowski, Maino, Pierce, Rosinski & Witkowski).**

-Erickson reported that his granddaughter recently returned from a trip to Washington DC where she played her violin at the Capitol. He also noted that his fishing club will be setting up a trout pond on March 19 for fishing and Jerry Polus will be helping him make some contacts with disabled veterans to come and fish.

-Desisles reported that she was going to contact the Yacht Club about Veterans Day. She stated that she has not done this yet and she wanted to know if she should pursue it. Erickson said that she should contact the Yacht Club to see what their interest may be and noted that she could do it telephonically, but in person may be better. Desisles said she thought the Honors Reward program would replace the need for all of the calls for Veterans Day and this is why she did not call the Yacht Club right away. Now that she has more details on the Honor Rewards program she will get in touch with the Yacht Club.

-Haskins shared an article from the *Press Gazette* regarding recent events at the VFW, but noted that there were no pictures of the Subcommittee and this was bothersome to him. He also noted that today was voting day and mentioned that a veterans' identification card is not considered valid identification for voting purposes.

-Koslowski commented that the reason the Subcommittee never seems to get notoriety is because there is nothing out there saying who the Subcommittee is. Erickson said that he has someone that will print up a sign for use at events if we come up with a design. He will talk to County Board staff about this.

-Witkowski shared an article that was in the *Press Gazette* about a news meeting at Karvana Coffeehouse where the public is invited to share their story ideas and have a cup of coffee and meet the newspaper staff.

11. **Such Other Matters as Authorized by Law. None.**

12. **Adjourn.**

Motion made by Jim Haskins, seconded by Rosemary Desisles to adjourn at 5:33 pm. Vote taken. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Therese Giannunzio
Recording Secretary